


GREAT VIRTUES OF THE DHAMMA

By Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda

 he Buddha's teaching is generally called the Dhamma or Dharma. It is neither a revelation nor a legendary speculation with a theological twist. It is the Truth ever prevailing in the Universe, and a unique discovery by a great enlightened religious teacher. However, Buddhism is the modern term used for the Dhamma and named after its discoverer. Gautama, the Buddha, realized the Truth and proclaimed it to the world. There is no doubt that it is difficult for ordinary people to comprehend it properly, since their minds are invariably clouded with illusion.

There are many virtues of the Dhamma that make it sublime and perfect in the highest meaning of the term. However, there are three aspects of the Dhamma which are to be noted. The first aspect is the theory that should be learnt in its pristine purity. The second aspect is the sincere application and practice of the precepts and the

living in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha, by abstaining from all evil, doing good and purifying the mind. The third aspect is to develop wisdom and to attain full understanding of the realities of all phenomena.

Amongst the many virtues of the Dhamma, there are six salient characteristics mentioned in the most authoritative texts. These particular Dhamma virtues are chanted by Buddhists during their daily devotional observances. The popular Pali verse expounding these Dhamma virtues is as follows:-

Svakkhato Bhagavata Dhammo, Sanditthiko, Akaliko, Ehipassiko, Opanayiko and Paccattam Veditabbo Vinnuhi.

A detailed description and explanation of these six salient characteristics are given hereon:-

1. **Svakkhato Bhagavata Dhammo**

This term means that the Dhamma was discovered and well-proclaimed by the Blessed One. This is considered as the common virtue of all the three aspects of the Teaching, namely the theory, the sincere practice and full realization while the rest of the terms are connected with the supramundane (*Lokuttara*) which consists of the eight stages of sanctity and Nibbana – considered as the *Summum Bonum* of Buddhism.

The Dhamma is well-expounded by the Master. It is excellent at the beginning, excellent in the middle, and excellent at the end. It has no contradictions and interpolations and it does not deviate from its straight

route. Just as every drop of water in the ocean has only one taste, the taste of salt, the Dhamma has one and only one taste at any time, the taste of Nibbanic bliss. The Dhamma is genuine in both letter and spirit. The subject matter of the Dhamma starts with *Sila* which is equated to right conduct, on which '*Samadhi*' a sense of tranquility of the mind is based. *Panna* or wisdom follows suit after '*Samadhi*' is firmly established.

The acquisition of Dhamma knowledge should commence with the study of the Dhamma by listening to learned lecturers expounding its intricacies and by understanding the correct methods for its practical application. Through constant practice, we should be able to suppress mental defilements which results in the mind becoming serene, calm and blissful. The achievement of such a mental state will pave the way for the acquisition of higher knowledge which is called insight or '*Vipassana*'. This insight knowledge when developed steadily would be the crowning glory of a brilliant achievement which can occur even within this lifetime.

The Buddha's explanation of the living being and the world constitutes the last word in human thought. Basing His findings on rational understanding, quite apart from traditions and legends of the day, the Buddha delved deep into the core of the Dhamma and emerged with his discovery of the realities underlying all phenomenal existence. Without being dictatorial or monopolistic, He proclaimed the Dhamma – a teaching which superseded all other teachings.

The Dhamma owes no allegiance to any so-called supreme power but was introduced by the Buddha on an individual basis, i.e. from man to man allowing freedom to the individual concerned to assess and think for himself the means to attain his own salvation without seeking any external aid. The Dhamma is universal and is of vital interest to mankind in any part of the world at any time.

Significantly, He gave His own rational and scientific interpretation to all the philosophical terms before they were used in His teaching of the Dhamma. For instance, Kamma which only denoted action prior to the Buddha, was given a new meaning as volition behind the action.

The noble Dhamma consistently denounced social injustice such as the rigid caste-system, human slavery and discriminatory low status accorded to females. The Buddha was never a dictator but a Teacher of spiritual democracy.

Starting with the *Tisarana* (three refuges) and culminating in the attainment of nibbanic bliss, a follower of the Buddha finds himself supremely secure under the guidance and protection of the Dhamma which was well proclaimed – *Svakkhato*.

2. **Sanditthiko**

Sanditthiko conveys the meaning that if the Dhamma is well studied and put into sincere practice, its beneficial results would be visible here and now. For instance, even

if a wicked man, who happens to be a veritable curse to himself and to society, were to take refuge in the Buddha and the Dhamma and commence a new life, all his troubles and miseries would come to an end. As shown by the life of Emperor Asoka, after embracing Buddhism he was transformed from being a wicked ruler known as Candasoka into a righteous one, Dhammasoka.

3. **Akaliko**

Akaliko implies that the beneficial effects to be derived from the practice of the Dhamma would not be delayed. The Dhamma, despite the length of time that has elapsed since its pronouncement, remains ever fresh and unchallenged. It runs parallel even with the latest scientific thought. If there is truth, that truth can never become old. Dhamma is that Truth which cannot grow old with age since it depicts the reality underlying all phenomenal existence in Samsara. Briefly, the Dhamma states that the world is unsatisfactory and that greed happens to be the inevitable cause of this state of affairs. The remedy for this unsatisfactoriness is the eradication of greed to be achieved through the practice of eight skilful factors known as the Noble Eightfold Path.

4. **Ehipassiko**

Ehipassiko constitutes an open invitation to all to come and see, to inspect, to scrutinize and if need be, even to criticize the Dhamma before accepting it because there is nothing mythical or mysterious about it. The Dhamma

is pure and crystal clear. It is as pure as solid gold. The Buddha Himself declared: 'Do not accept what I say through mere respect towards me. Just as purity of gold is ascertained by melting or rubbing on a touchstone, likewise the Dhamma should be accepted only after very close scrutiny.' This fearless assertion of allowing the teaching to be closely examined marks the greatness of the Buddha and the unwavering truth of the sublime Dhamma.

5. **Opanayiko**

Opanayiko means that all sincere adherents of the Dhamma would be treading along the path that leads to eternal peace and happiness. The Dhamma states that there are four stages of a sanctity and fruition worth achieving by means of gradual development. The Dhamma leads its adherents from one stage to another until they find themselves fully liberated from all bonds and fetters of existence.

6. **Paccattam Veditabbo Vinnuhi**

This phrase '*Paccattam Veditabbo Vinnuhi*' implies that the Dhamma is to be comprehended individually by the wise. No one can absorb the Dhamma on behalf of another person, just as no one can quench the thirst of another person by himself taking a drink. It can be observed that there are two significant aspects in this term: firstly, the attainment of enlightenment is individualistic in character and secondly, the Dhamma can only be

comprehended by the wise.

The Buddha is not a saviour but an instructor – a Teacher who showed the path for others to tread. It is left to the individual concerned to observe *Sila*, right conduct and practise ‘*Samadhi*’, right concentration and subsequently try to develop ‘*Panna*’, the intuitive wisdom which enables the individual to work out his own emancipation through his own efforts. ■